

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL

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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete.

VA LAUNCHES 10-YEAR HEALTH STUDY OF 60,000 NEW VETERANS (VA News Release) WASHINGTON -- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has initiated a large, long-term study to look carefully at a broad array of health issues that may affect Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) veterans and their counterparts who served during the same time period. VA's "National Health Study for a New Generation of U.S. Veterans" will begin with 30,000 veterans deployed to OEF/OIF and 30,000 comparison veterans who were not deployed.

The study will include veterans who served in each branch of service, representing active duty, Reserve, and National Guard members. Women will be over-sampled to make sure they are represented and will comprise 20 percent of the study, or 12,000 women. A combination of mail surveys, online surveys, telephone interviews, and in-person physical evaluations will be used to collect data from the veterans.

The study will compare the deployed and non-deployed veterans in terms of chronic medical conditions, traumatic brain injury (TBI), post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other psychological conditions, general health perceptions, reproductive health, pregnancy outcomes, functional status, use of health care, behavioral risk factors (smoking, drinking, seatbelt use, speeding, motorcycle helmet use, and sexual behavior), and VA disability compensation.

VA has contracted with an independent veteran-owned research firm, HMS Technologies Inc., to collect the data.

LOAN GUARANTY CERTIFICATE OF ELIGIBILITY CHANGE VA Loan Guaranty Certificates of Eligibility will no longer display a veteran's date of birth. This change was made to limit the amount of personal data being displayed on Certificates of Eligibility. However, veterans will still need to provide their date of birth when submitting an application for a determination of eligibility in order to process their request.

DOD ANNOUNCES TRANSFERABILITY OPTIONS FOR "POST 9/11 GI BILL" (U. S. Department of Defense News Release June 23, 2009) The Defense Department announced today its policy for transferring educational benefits to the spouses and children of service members under the "Post 9/11 GI Bill," which takes effect Aug. 1, 2009.

Career service members on active duty or in the selected reserve on Aug. 1, 2009, and who are eligible for the "Post 9/11 GI Bill," may be entitled to transfer all or a portion of their education entitlement to one or more family members. To be eligible, service members must have served in the Armed Forces for at least six years, and agree to serve four additional years, from the date of election to transfer.

Service members with at least 10 years of service, who by DoD or service policy are prevented from committing to four additional years, may transfer their benefits provided they commit for the maximum amount of time allowed by such policy or statute.

Additionally, to maintain proper force structure and promotion opportunities, temporary rules have been developed for service members eligible to retire between Aug. 1, 2009 and Aug. 1, 2012. Depending on their retirement eligibility date, these service members will commit to one to three additional years, from the date of election to transfer.

The services will provide further implementation guidance. Beginning June 29, 2009, eligible service members may make transfer designations by visiting this Web site: <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/TEB/>. The full transferability policy is available at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/DTM%2009-003%20Post%209-11%20GI%20Bill.pdf>.

The Department of Veterans Affairs administers the "Post 9/11 GI Bill," and determines eligibility for education benefits. Further information on eligibility, benefit levels, and application procedures can be found at their Web site, <http://www.gibill.va.gov>.

VA WEB SITE HELPS COLLEGE COUNSELORS AID

VETERANS (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has launched a new Web site to strengthen the connection between college and university mental health professionals and the veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts now studying on their campuses.

The Web site, www.mentalhealth.va.gov/College_1 features recommended training for college and university counselors, with online modules including “Operation SAVE” for suicide prevention, “PTSD 101” and “Helping Students Who Drink Too Much.” It also will feature a resource list that will be updated regularly.

Although the Web site is designed primarily for counselors, it also serves as a resource for veteran-students who wish to learn more about the challenges they may face in adjusting to their lives after leaving the military.

The new site is one of several Web-based tools VA has developed to assist veterans in dealing with mental health issues. Others include a guide for families of military members returning from deployment and information about a suicide prevention hotline for veterans.

VA SENDS STIMULUS PAYMENTS TO VETERANS

(VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has requested the Department of the Treasury to make \$250 payments to eligible veterans as part of President Obama’s recovery plan. The first payments were sent Monday, June 22. All payments will have been made by June 30. VA estimates \$500 million in payments will be made to approximately 1.9 million veterans and eligible beneficiaries as part of this measure.

To be eligible for the payment, VA beneficiaries must have received VA’s compensation, pension, dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC), or spina bifida benefits at any time between November 2008 and January 2009. Also, beneficiaries must reside within the United States, Puerto Rico, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa or the U.S. Virgin Islands.

No application was necessary. VA used its existing payment records to determine eligibility for the \$250 payment. Beneficiaries will receive their payments the same way they receive their monthly VA benefits -- either by direct deposit or in the mail.

This payment is not countable in determining eligibility for VA income-based benefits. The payment is tax-free.

VA beneficiaries who also receive benefits from the Social Security Administration or Railroad Retirement Board were paid through those agencies, and will therefore not receive the payment from VA.

VA’s Internet site – www.va.gov/recovery – provides current information about VA’s work to deliver its portion of recovery act funds to benefit veterans.

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:**SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255**

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 1-800-827-1000

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)

Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications 1-877-823-2378

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) 1-877-838-2778

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - 1-877-222-8387

VA Health Revenue Service (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 1-800-669-8477

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -

CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023

CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024

Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 1-800-733-8387

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 352-793-7740
6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 33467 561-649-6489
4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 32218 904-358-3510
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846
9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 1-800-697-6947

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office 1-800-829-4833

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: www.va.gov

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) www.warms.vba.va.gov

St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:

www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete

Property Management (sale of VA-reposessed homes):

www.ocwen.com

Federal employment: www.usajobs.opm.gov

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: www.floridavets.org

“Florida Vets First:” www.FloridaVetsFirst.com

Library of Congress (information on pending legislation) thomas.loc.gov